

**REMARKS BY
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**BEFORE
THE NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILWAY
ANNUAL SAFETY MEETING**

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Thank you, Wick, and thank you to Norfolk Southern's board of directors for inviting me here today. Secretary LaHood sends his warm regards, as does the rest of the leadership at DOT.

It is an honor to be addressing you this morning. It's quite gratifying to spend time with people who are passionate about FRA's most important responsibility – making sure our nation's railroads are safe.

Every award winner present today, as well as the rest of your colleagues at Norfolk Southern, should be incredibly proud of the work you've done.

You deserve to be recognized.

I know firsthand about the potential hazards front line employees face day in and day out. I've walked in those shoes.

I'm a fifth-generation railroader who started with the Illinois Central out of high school in Chicago. During my railroad career, I worked as a yard switchman, road trainman and commuter-rail conductor.

When the IC sold their Commuter Division, I later worked for Metra and then served as State Director for the United Transportation Union in Illinois.

I've served on the boards of large transportation planning groups, and as a Mayor ran a Village government.

So now, as FRA Administrator I have dealt with rail safety issues from multiple points of view.

I have seen firsthand the dreadful impact that grade crossing collisions and trespasser deaths have on families, communities and crew members.

And too many coworkers and good friends of mine have lost their lives on the job.

But, I've also seen how working together, railroads, labor and government agencies have made our rail system safer.

Just two weeks ago in Washington we held a workshop dealing with the findings of the Switching Operations Fatalities Analysis, or SOFA, working group.

It was well attended by the senior operating officers and staff of our nation's railroads, the Presidents and senior staff of the two unions representing operating crafts, and staff of FRA.

And I heard later that day – from all sides in separate conversations – how beneficial and productive the day was in strategizing on how to prevent fatalities.

The level of excitement and goodwill was invigorating to me. This is what family—and I do consider this industry as a family— working together can achieve.

And I think the recipients of today's awards exemplify the very best among us.

Your steadfast commitment to safety through teamwork and proactive efforts set an example for the rail industry as a whole.

The President's high-speed rail program has generated unprecedented enthusiasm and excitement—and attracted the lion's share of media and Congressional attention – but please rest assured that FRA remains a safety agency foremost, above all other things.

And the term safety is more meaningful than ever.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act is bringing about historic changes to the railroad industry—be it through hours of service reform, implementation of positive train control, or the promise of new far reaching risk reduction strategies.

With our expanded mandate, we must all think about safety as it pertains to upgrades of existing freight and passenger rail service and implementation of high-speed passenger rail.

To that end, we must reaffirm our commitments to running safe railroads to ensure the safety of railroad workers, passengers, shippers, and those who live and work along the lines.

Over the past several decades, the number of train accidents and collisions at highway-rail grade crossings has steadily declined, leveling off in recent years.

But despite those improvements, on-the-job injuries continue to be problematic, and on-the-job deaths are unacceptably all too frequent.

Since the train accident rate has remained relatively flat over the past ten years, we have to adopt new approaches to safety that will come closer to reaching our goal of zero accidents, injuries and deaths.

Management and labor must redouble their efforts to create a workplace that is not only safe, but completely free of harassment and intimidation.

There is no doubt that the railroad industry has made great strides in this vein, but we want to maintain a culture of safety that permeates all railroad operations and that requires open and honest communication.

I want to highlight an effort that we believe will reap significant rewards in the years to come – our Risk Reduction Program.

The Program relies heavily on “upstream” predictive data to help identify causal factors that contribute to accidents. The data is then used to develop innovative methods to address the underlying risk factors.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act requires Class 1 and passenger Railroads to implement risk reduction programs with three essential elements: an overall risk reduction strategy, fatigue management plans, and a technology deployment plan.

We’ve already achieved some success under the Confidential Close Call Reporting System, which allows employees to voluntarily and anonymously report "close call" incidents that could have resulted in an accident, but did not. The airline and mining industries have successfully employed similar programs for years, and today, I will reiterate FRA’s call for management and labor to partner with us to promote such programs.

Confidentiality is a central tenant of the program, and something we take very seriously. The cumulative knowledge we’re acquiring from C3RS, as we like to call it, is being used to formulate real solutions.

In addition, we are forging ahead with other Risk Reduction Program efforts, including peer-to-peer training programs, management development systems, and the Collision Hazard Analysis, which is already in place on some commuter railroads.

The opportunity for improvement is great, and the dedication and hard work of people like you will transform the industry for the 21st century.

Let me conclude by providing a brief update on the Administration’s plans for high-speed rail.

As you know, President Obama announced the recipients of the \$8 billion in Recovery Act funds for high-speed rail and these funds will be supplemented with another \$2.5 billion from Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations.

We anticipate soliciting applications from states in the next few months and announcing selections for this second round by the end of this fiscal year.

The High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program will dramatically change the transportation landscape of this country. It will offer the traveling public new options and reduce congestion in our nation’s busiest corridors.

But I want to make clear; we have a freight rail industry that is the envy of the world.

So as we move forward in implementing a world-class HSR program, we cannot do so at the expense of our already world-class freight rail network.

Our vision aims to bring rural and urban communities closer together and make them more livable for all citizens. As the intercity passenger rail network is improved and expanded upon, the environmental impact of getting cars off the road will be noticeable and enduring.

We will work with states to ramp up their capacity to plan and manage these projects. And we will be calling upon freight rail companies to work with us as partners in this endeavor.

This commitment to rail more broadly is an attempt to reestablish rail's place at the table when it comes to national transportation policy.

This recognition of rail's importance is expected to yield greater public investment, and I submit, must be matched by an equivalent commitment to safety.

The award recipients among us have already begun down the right path in that regard.

Thank you again for the invitation to join you today, and for your attention. I am honored to be taking part in today's program.

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